

**Parallels Between D.H. Lawrence's
"Daughters of the Vicar" and
"The Horse Dealer's Daughter"**

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Among the vast legion of creators that contribute to the artistic field of literature, only a small number of great fiction writers have accomplished the difficult task of developing a unique literary approach that not only spans their life's work but also forges their many literary pieces into a single meaningful work of art. Often, these writers utilize their stories in an attempt to convey certain themes and beliefs, whether those beliefs prove to be political, philosophical, or religious in orientation. One such writer is D. H. Lawrence. His strong convictions, rooted in his *vitalism*, are ubiquitous in his vast collection of creative works. Lawrence employed a number of literary tactics in order to champion his vitalism; these tactics are evident in the two stories "The Horse Dealer's Daughter" and "Daughters of the Vicar," which have profound similarities in their symbolic plot structure, rhythmic form, and thematic delivery. An analysis of the parallels between these two stories reveals the characteristic storytelling elements that defined some of Lawrence's most powerful literary achievements.

The plots of both stories are not only tailored to Lawrence's typical themes, but are very much alike in their symbolic *diagnosis*. E. W. Tedlock, Jr. calls "The Horse Dealer's Daughter" a "memorable, beautifully wrought development of Lawrence's vitalistic death and resurrection theme" (Tedlock 114). Comparatively, most critics agree that "Daughters of the Vicar" follows the death and rebirth plotline as well. In her article "D. H. Lawrence and Kate Millett," Janice H. Harris describes how Lawrence uses the inversion of the sleeping beauty myth; in the article she

signifies Alfred Durant as a male version of sleeping beauty who is “awakened by the touch of a woman” (Harris 527). Tedlock’s description of “Daughters of the Vicar” further serves to expand upon its symbolic resurrection plot. In his book, Tedlock claims that Alfred Durant “is restored through the touch of an embrace and what can be described as an experience of death and rebirth” (Tedlock 33). With this in mind, Lawrence employs specific scenarios and plot devices in order to achieve a successful rendering of a resurrection story.

In both of Lawrence’s tales, the stories open in winter with the action of withdrawal as “the family pulls apart in separate directions in an atmosphere of death and the end of a living relationship with each other and the earth” (McCabe 66). In “The Horse Dealer’s Daughter,” Mabel Pervin dwells in “the greyness of death” (Ford 92) as she “finds her money gone, her household destroyed, and her life shattered by the death of her father” (Meyers 346). Drowning in a feeling of hopelessness, Mabel finds solace with her dead mother and even attempts suicide, but a series of meetings with Dr. Ferguson arouse feelings in him; according to Thomas H. McCabe, her movement toward death is not reversed by this flash of unconscious communion,” but Dr. Ferguson nonetheless feels rejuvenated in life (McCabe 66). George H. Ford discusses the progress of a “Laurentian narrative” and how it “involves first a descent, a figurative dying...and afterwards an ascent or resurrection in which the man and woman discover a new strength and a fresh appreciation of life’s joys” (Ford 107). In her state of despair, Mabel makes this exact symbolic and literal descent as she immerses herself into the gloomy waters of death (66). She has a profound experience with death before Dr. Ferguson rescues her and brings her to his house in order to warm her. Jeffrey Meyers calls the following scene a “ritualistic rubdown” that “recalls similar erotic scenes” in other tales by Lawrence in which the characters discover each other through intimate touch (Meyers 348). Mabel then asks Ferguson, twice, if he loves

her, throwing him into a state of confusion even as “his soul melts” (McCabe 67). Tedlock’s summary describes the remaining plot, saying, “her resurrection from death in life is accomplished by his full commitment to her” and “through her touch he is drawn from his professional impersonality and fear” (Tedlock 114).

Similarly in “Daughters of the Vicar,” the main story begins in winter with Louisa Lindley and her sister, Mary, surrounded by death images. Lawrence reveals that, “the girls’ hearts were chilled and hardened with fear of this perpetual, cold penury, this narrow struggle, this horrible nothingness of their lives” (Lawrence 72). Lawrence continually describes the family as “cold and shutoff” (80) from each other; Louisa begins to pull away from her family in bitterness as Mr. Massy, a clergyman shrouded in death imagery, marries her sister, compelling in Mary a kind of death from living. Lawrence makes it clear as he says, “[s]he had a new freedom...she had got rid of her body” (81), implying that she had freed herself from flesh and began only living for higher ideals. Louisa, who “stood isolated from everybody” (84) leaves her family at the “dingy vicarage” (83), traveling through the snow in order to make a descent similar to the one found in “The Horse Dealer’s Daughter.” Lawrence uses similar imagery of descent into darkness as Louisa goes to Alfred Durant’s home. At this portion of the story, Lawrence describes how Louisa “descended the stone stairs, and stood below in the little backyard, in the dimness and the semi-secrecy” (89). The images and words used by Lawrence unequivocally fit George H. Ford’s notion of descent as a literary device in Lawrence’s narrative structure. Louisa, like Mabel, has a profound experience in which she wrestles with the reality of death as she aids the dying Mrs. Durant. Ford insists that a descent in Lawrence “exposes [the characters]...not only to death but to some unseen forces of renewal urging their return to life” (Ford 107). Following this descent, as in “The Horse Dealer’s Daughter,” there is a ritualized

scene of intimacy, followed by a question from Louisa, repeated twice—“Do you want me to go?” (Lawrence 109). This question, saturated with symbolic meaning, forces Alfred to confront his feelings for Louisa. As Tedlock points out, Alfred appears troubled and “makes no response to Louisa until she forces a choice by offering herself” (Tedlock 33). Tedlock continues, “Then [Alfred] is restored through the touch of an embrace and what can be described as an experience of death and rebirth” (33). George H. Ford’s assertion, “Lawrence relies upon analyses of motives and feelings instead of upon visual presentation” (Ford 93) is justified and evident in both stories. In this way, “Daughters of the Vicar” and “The Horse Dealer’s Daughter” not only unfold and culminate in similar symbolic plot structures, but they also reveal Lawrence’s ability to generate energy and movement in his stories through a rhythmic prose form that reflects the internal struggles and relationships of his characters.

In his essay on Lawrence’s prose form, Thomas McCabe accuses many critics of misunderstanding Lawrence’s form as “apparently loose and rambling” (McCabe 64). McCabe instead suggests that readers and critics should not overlook his “underlying coherent rhythmic form” because they give his stories a “living shape” (64). McCabe’s essay expounds upon this claim, stating that Lawrence perceived meaning in the rhythms of life, including “the endlessly changing to-and-fro relationship between man and woman” and “life’s ever-recurring cycle of birth, growth, and...death” (64). McCabe argues that the rhythm of life shapes many of Lawrence’s narratives and that Lawrence relies on the use of both “the conventional devices of repeated scenes, phrases, and characters” and also on the rhythmic devices of “relations of attraction-repulsion between his characters and his expanding rhythmic imagery which enables him to reveal psychic experience” (64). McCabe supports his argument, providing evidence that “Lawrence [disliked] writers who [turned] away from this kind of rhythmic, living form in art to

a mechanical form” (65). McCabe further asserts that the writer’s “best and most characteristic stories are those which possess rhythmic elements of attraction-repulsion between the characters and rhythmic images that move toward a revelation of psychic experiences” (65). Additionally, criticism from Herbert Lindenberger indicates that the meetings between Lawrence’s characters become “a ritualized demonstration of the vitality and mystery latent in human relationships” and that the plot can be traced, not through external action, but as a “succession of concentrated moments of inward experience that they undergo” (Lindenberger 335-6).

Both “The Horse Dealer’s Daughter” and “Daughters of the Vicar” readily display the rhythm described by McCabe and Lindenberger. The former, says McCabe, is a “perfect example of the kind of rhythmic form that is unique to Lawrence” (66). He goes on to describe the rhythmic progression of the story as it moves “from death to life, from paralysis to living, rhythmic relationship” (66). In his essay, McCabe explains that Mabel and Dr. Ferguson undergo a series of meetings, which are ruled by the forces of attraction and repulsion. McCabe lucidly illustrates the way that “this attraction-repulsion controls the emotional pace of Lawrence’s individual scenes...and the overall movement, the difficult rhythm, is the whole shape of this rising and falling tension” (65). McCabe also indicates that the rhythm of the tale is progressive, moving “forward into closer and closer relationship” in which there is an “ever-adjusting balance between the worlds of the lovers” (68).

McCabe expounds upon the progression, declaring that certain images mark the deepening relationship of Dr. Ferguson and Mabel, complementing the “inherent tension of attraction-repulsion” (65). He says that images of death, such as “the winter season; the bleak, grey weather; the cold, grey water” are broken up by the images of new life—fire, warm flesh, and eye contact (68). McCabe declares that “eyes are the dominant image bearing new life” (68)

and provides examples in a series of rhythmic utilizations of this image as the two characters become more involved. George H. Ford's study of Lawrence declares that Lawrence "relies upon the expression in a character's eyes to convey states of feeling" (Ford 92-3) Jeffrey Meyers' essay on "The Horse Dealer's Daughter" supports the analysis of both critics. In his article, Meyers claims that there are "four eye-meetings...which provide a thematic structure and mark the progress of their love" (346). McCabe defines and provides numerous examples of another rhythmic device as well—the use of hand images; according to the critic, "the interplay of hand images traces the growth of the lovers' relationship" (68). When Mabel asks Ferguson, twice, about his feelings for her, Lawrence creates a rhythmic pendulum in which each character begins to become conscious of doubts and fears; McCabe asserts that the "rhythm of their approach starts to reverse as [Ferguson] continues to hold back" (67). Even after the rhythm draws them into further intimate contact, the pattern continues. McCabe explains, "Mabel also feels the shock of a new connection...just as the doctor was amazed, bewildered, and afraid when she clutched his legs, so she shrinks from the soft, penetrating grip of his hand" (67). George H. Ford posits that Mabel also fears "what might happen again if release is not secure and if the newly-found life-rhythm does not drown out the sound of its sinister opposite" (92). McCabe, along with his fellow critics, explains that Lawrence uses a series of life images, especially those of eyes and water (in the form of tears), to mark the increasing closeness of the two characters, culminating in physical embrace (68). After this highly intimate rendering of the attraction-repulsion device, they "become shy of each other" (Meyers 350) again after changing clothes, marking further development in the perpetual cycle of attraction-repulsion.

Lawrence's "Daughters of the Vicar" mirrors this rhythmic pattern almost perfectly. E. W. Tedlock, Jr. provides examples of Lawrence's "semantic method" and how the writer

approached this story rhythmically by “emphasizing and repeating key words” (Tedlock 32). For example, when Lawrence brings Louisa and Alfred to the critical deciding point in their budding relationship, a sequence of repeated dialogue reinforces the drama and importance of the moment:

Then suddenly a sharp pang, like lightning, seared her from head to foot, and she was beyond herself. “Do you want me to go?” she asked, controlled, yet speaking out of a fiery anguish, as if the words were spoken from her without her intervention. He went white under his dirt. “Why?” he asked, turning to her in fear, compelled. “Do you want me to go?” she repeated. “Why?” he asked again. “Because I wanted to stay with you,” she said, suffocated, with her lungs full of fire. (Lawrence 111)

In addition to repeated phrases, Lawrence also makes liberal use of images associated with life, such as eyes, tears, arms, heat, and light. In this way, he develops a rhythm for his readers to follow as they track the progression of the characters’ potentially vital connection. In both stories, it becomes obvious, as McCabe expresses, that “Lawrence sees life itself as rhythm” and that his stories are based in the “rhythmic movement of nature itself” (65). The critic goes on, saying, “Lawrence saw a static perfection as essentially dead—in life as well as in fiction” (McCabe 65). In this way, Lawrence’s rhythmic prose form is directly intertwined with his thematic message, because for Lawrence “...the rhythm itself, the constantly changing relationships of his characters, becomes the highest good; and usually he seeks no final resolution of tensions” (65).

Critics and readers alike often find fault with Lawrence’s seemingly ambiguous narrative endings. It is the belief of McCabe and several other critics, however, that Lawrence’s endings

are directly related to his thematic message of vitalism. For example, one critic affirms the belief that “it is characteristic of Lawrence that the ‘happy ending’ is complex, contain[ing] the fears both of the world outside their rapport and of the risks of commitment” (Tedlock 115). Combined with McCabe’s proclamation that, for Lawrence, a final resolution of tensions would be incompatible with the natural rhythm of nature, it becomes obvious that the inconclusive endings of both “Daughters of the Vicar” and “The Horse Dealer’s Daughter” effectively advance Lawrence’s theme of vitalism. Furthermore, in his article, “D. H. Lawrence and Sex,” Peter Nazareth gives a detailed account of the types of love that Lawrence assails with his thematic literary attacks. Nazareth states that Lawrence condemns the type of love that “we find in most pop songs and love-story magazines” (40); this is because it leads people to form images that they fall in love with, which are actually projections of the self, creating a “subtle form of narcissism” (40). Nazareth provides examples of criticism against the “sentimental love-story” and claims that Lawrence’s stories, such as “Daughters of the Vicar,” demonstrate a truer love story because they “deal with all the complexities of love” (40). In this way, the ending of both stories reflect Lawrence’s thematic attempt at portraying realistic love.

Additionally, Lawrence’s two “Daughter” stories draw on a number of other themes, which critics have analyzed at length. Jeffrey Meyers lists most of Lawrence’s characteristic themes: “revelation of truth through nakedness and touch, release of primitive emotions through ritual and ceremony, self-discovery and return to life through regenerative love” (346). In both stories, Lawrence clearly uses nakedness and ritualized action in order to bring his characters into this regenerative love; Meyers states that, in Lawrence’s narratives, “the watery regeneration and archetypal rite of immersion, nakedness and new clothes as well as the sudden transition from water to firm land, from death to life, from isolation to conjunction, from despair to delight,

from indifference to passion, lead inevitably to emotional commitment and to the promise of a new existence” (349). Lawrence’s themes are reinforced in “The Horse Dealer’s Daughter” as “Mabel...rescues the priggish Ferguson...and ‘rips him open’ emotionally as he had ripped her clothing physically” (Meyers 350). In similar fashion, Tedlock describes the scenario in “The Horse Dealer’s Daughter” as follows: “Her resurrection from death in life is accomplished by his full commitment to her. When she revives in nakedness, she feels that she is loved...[and] through her touch he is drawn from his professional impersonality and fear” (114). Meyers and McCabe both point out that the characters endure a painful separation of their old selves; Mabel, for example, “knows that their love is real but fears her submission to passion and to sexual desire” (350). Ferguson’s pain is “from the displaced old connections” of his previous way of life (McCabe 67).

In comparison, of “Daughters of the Vicar” Tedlock asserts, “Louisa achieves her vitalistic Lawrencian salvation from ideal love in the physical intimacy of washing the coal-grime from Alfred’s naked back” (32). Lawrence also describes the pain of Louisa and Alfred’s leaving behind of old connections. In the story, Lawrence writes: “[T]hey were silent for a long time, too much mixed up with passion and grief and death to do anything but hold each other in pain and kiss with long, hurting kisses wherein fear was transfused into desire” (111). The theme of overcoming fear in light of love and self-discovery occurs often in criticism on Lawrence’s stories. In his critical essay on Lawrence’s fiction, R. E. Pritchard addresses how Lawrence portrays the characters as they overcome fear of social inhibitions. According to Pritchard, Louisa “demands for herself a passional relationship, real love and self-fulfillment, even at the cost of social exclusion” (Pritchard 61). Pritchard balances this description with Louisa’s sister, Mary, and demonstrates how Louisa’s washing of Alfred’s back “breaks through convention and

their inhibitions,” in turn releasing “them into a new simple truth and unselfconsciousness” (61-2). George H. Ford argues, along with many other critics, that this “transfiguration or [delivery] from self” strengthens the theme of self-realization; in each story, the discovery of each other is also a “self-discovery, a major epiphany in which a brief moment of time expands into great circles” (94). “Daughters of the Vicar” and “The Horse Dealer’s Daughter” act as obvious sign posts that readily reveal Lawrence’s themes and facilitate understanding between his readers and his tales.

In conclusion, D. H. Lawrence’s highly unique mastery over the elements of form, plot, and theme is clearly and resoundingly presented in his stories “The Horse Dealer’s Daughter” and “Daughters of the Vicar.” Tightly controlled and tempered in the fires of his deep belief in vitalism, these two stories offer an excellent springboard for diving into the profound meanings behind Lawrence’s complex stories. Quite prolific during his short life, Lawrence was able to develop and hone a literary style that was capable of assailing readers with powerfully charged vitalistic messages, as seen in both “The Horse Dealer’s Daughter” and “Daughters of the Vicar.” These two short works of fiction serve not only to exemplify Lawrence’s ability to duplicate his talents in multiple works, but also to demonstrate that Lawrence’s numerous works are meant to be seen as individual strands in a much larger web of literary meaning.

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Dr. Kearney's Comments: Christopher's essay establishes remarkable parallels between these two tales. What is more, his thematic examination of these stories is based largely upon an in-depth knowledge of Lawrence's Pollyanalytics--his philosophy and psychology. The essay is a most solid and satisfactory piece of scholarship, certainly.